

## **Say the Word!**

Written by Patrick Matthews  
Friday, 27 May 2011 11:43

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Here's a fun free game that fits in around the edges of your normal life. You don't sit down to play this game, but rather play it as you go through your day. It gives everyone another layer of interaction, and can turn dull moments into hilarious ones. It's perfect for vacations or lazy summer days at home.

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As far as I know, I created this game, but it's so simple and basic that I wouldn't be surprised if there are a thousand different variations out there. I've seen it pop up on television and radio shows, and for good reason. It's a lot of fun.

Before you dive in, realize that this is not a game that you sit around a table and play. Instead, you start it in the morning, and the game runs in the background during your regular day. This makes it great for vacations or even car trips, not only adding texture to your day, but serving as a constant source of conversation and laughs.

### **Number of Players: 2+**

If you're playing with more than two players, see the optional rule "Making the Game Last."

### **Setting up the game**

Each player writes 10 words on a piece of paper. Cut the paper up so that there is only one word per piece of paper. Drop all the pieces into a cup or a hat or some such thing. After shaking up the container, each player picks one piece of paper from the hat, memorizes whatever is written on it and then seals it up in an envelope. The player then writes his or her name on the front of the envelope and keeps the envelope. You don't have to use the envelope if you don't want to, but it does stop any cheating from happening.

You may also want to set a time limit on the game (one day, one week, one weekend - something like that).

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### A note about the words:

Words should not be commonplace things that are said every day. For example, "the" would be a bad choice because the game would be over in 10 seconds. However, if you get too crazy with your words (like "serendipity"), you run the risk of actually picking that word and having to try to get someone else to say it.

## Playing

The goal of the game is to get at least one other player to say the word that you have sealed up in your envelope. This is not an exclusive activity. After you have your words, go about your regular business. The game is played throughout the day, tucked into the regular conversations that you normally have. As soon as you get the other person to say your word, take out your envelope and open it to show that you have just won!

## Optional Rules

Here are a couple options that can help you tweak the game for your family:

- Limit the words to being only proper nouns (like "Venice", "George Washington", or "Spiderman").
- Instead of using words, use phrases (like "ah, Venice", "once more into the breach", or "where's my pencil?")
- **A Cooperative Variation:** After you've mastered playing with your friends and family, try the same game but with other people. Pick only one word (instead of a different one for each person), and the winner is the first person who manages to get someone *who is not playing the game* to say the word in front of someone else that is.
- **Making the Game Last:** This is particularly fun if a bunch of people are playing): Keep the collection of words available, and when a person manages to get their word said, they pick another word and start trying to use that one. The winner is whoever has the most words at the end of the day.

## Strategy and Educational Value

The key to this game is the social aspect. Winning requires that you pay close attention to the other players. You have to hear what they're saying, and understand how they'll react to what you're saying. Another obvious way to make this game educational is to make the words things you want your kids to learn about (like presidents, for example). That can be fun, but first play the game the regular way. Get hooked on the fun, before you start layering in the obvious lessons.

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In addition to being the editor and web guy for Games for Educators, Patrick Matthews writes stories, designs games, and builds web sites. Stop by [DaddyTales](#) for a quick laugh, or check out [Live Oak Games](#) to see some of his award-winning games.